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Driving academic motivation – what brings us to the table?

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Summary

The intended focus of this research is to explore the relationship academic (faculty) staff and motivation, within Business Schools. A typical academic would identify their role as teaching, research and administration and the literature would suggest that academics are focussed, self-driven and have a high work ethic particularly for what interests them and for what they perceive as academic or academic related work. However at the same time academics are aware of the increase in managerialism within their organisations and the increased administration placed on them which they do not perceive as academic related. This research attempts to derive the key drivers of what makes an academic tick.

Track: 7 Human Resource Management

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Development of this paper prior to presentation at the BAM conference in September 2017:

It is intended that the data collection will have been completed and that the data will have been analysed prior to the conference so that preliminary findings can be included in the conference discussion.

Introduction

Motivation is a well discussed topic which has been debated for a century or more, with many models proposed, discussed and critiqued over that time. From Content to Process theories to more modern contemporary models the desire to get the best out of people and to understand what makes individuals and groups tick, has challenged managers and academics through time.

Johnston (2016) focussing on academics' motivation suggests that the two key drivers in the motivation of academics were expertise and search for meaning, suggesting that academics pride themselves in knowledge and application of that knowledge. He advocates the importance of intrinsic motivation in the academics' psyche as the fundamental categorisation, and although recognises the importance of extrinsic motivation suggests this has a lesser role. Mullins (2005) associates intrinsic motivation with psychological reward, while associating extrinsic motivation with material rewards.

A criticism of Johnston's paper is the small nature of the study, it was conducted on a small scale at one university, and as such while valid in its findings did not provide enough evidence for generalizability or for real depth of analysis or critique. This study expands the field and draws on a greater number of Universities and respondents to identify if there is evidence across the sector. The paper remains focussed on Business School academics as the focus for the research, however there remains opportunities in the future to expand the scope and research whether there is consensus across academia or whether Business Schools differ from other subject disciplines.

Literature Review

Motivation and the Academic

Recently theorists have concentrated on developing an understanding of what drives individuals internally to perform tasks. Fundamentally this has become known as intrinsic motivation. Kinman and Kinman (2001) highlight these principles and argue that intrinsic motivation has both a cognitive and affective element. They support this concept and argue that two key drivers are mastery (cognitive) and curiosity (affective) within individuals. This

supports the notion for academics. Importantly alongside these factors, individuals will also require self-determination and focus.

Alongside these ideas, Wilkesmann and Schmid (2014) highlight autonomy, relatedness and competence as the 3 key elements of intrinsic, suggesting that an individual's desire to be in control of what they are doing, want to belong and know what they are doing.. In a study among German Academics they identify teaching, research and administration as the three key functions of the role of an academic. A notion supported by Krivokapic-Skoko and O'Neill (2008), However Wilkesmann and Schmid (2014) highlight research as the key foundation to a successful career. Furthermore Wilkesmann and Schmid (2014 p6) argue academics are "highly intrinsically motivated to teach and to do research" (p6). Crucially, "Quality teaching has become an increasingly important issue within academia" (Dahl and Smimou, 2011, p384). Wilkesmann and Schmid (2014) contend that it is important to promote teaching and create parity of esteem with research. Arguably one of the key foci of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is the intention to drive up the quality of teaching while putting teaching to a level of esteem as research. Assessment of research has existed for some 30 years plus and as such, it is suggested has improved and focussed the quality of research.

Importantly, Stringer et al (2011) suggest a positive link between intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction, while at the same time link extrinsic motivation and job satisfaction negatively. According to Rowley (1996) academics are crucial to the success of any higher education institution, noting the direct relationship between the academic and the student . Importantly Krivokapic-Skoko and O'Neill (2008) point to the impact of the academic on the learning process noting that there is an infectious impact of enthusiastic lecturers on students. However they suggest that a key factor is how academics see their role, and the role of education. In line with this, Gammie (2006) argues that individuals have three approaches to their job role: job orientation, with a focus on financial rewards; career orientation supporting a focus on career advancement; social orientation focussing on undertaking socially acceptable work.

Impact of the Psychological Contract

The psychological contract (Rousseau, 2005) has a major influence of motivation, and therefore organisational performance. In organisations or roles where discretionary effort

(Schein, 2010) is fundamental to carrying out the job roles e.g. professional and academic contracts, the role of the psychological contract become more prevalent. How a tutor interprets their psychological contract, their tie to the organisation will dictate their participation in their role (Shen, 2010.) Fundamentally Krivokapic-Skoko and O'Neill (2008) suggest that understanding and managing the psychological contract can lead to improved organisational effectiveness. If staff are engaged through a psychological contract which is relational it is suggested that discretionary effort will flow, however those whose psychological contract is more transactional in nature will be less likely to demonstrate discretionary effort.

Johnston (2017) suggests there is evidence that on the whole academics are self-motivated individuals who are tolerant of organisational pressures and attitudes as a trade-off for autonomy and flexibility. In particular academics hold several psychological contracts with different agents of the organisation and as such are flexible in their demands and expectations of their employers, and subsequently identify more with their department or school rather than the institution.

Impact of Managerialism

Bathmaker (1999) conducted a study on a University in the 1990s which was a former polytechnic. She highlights increased managerialism in the sector and particularly in the 'new' universities. Gammie (2006) supported this identifying this rise of managerialism. Key to this was the politicised control that was introduced to the sector including the use of Research Assessment (RAE as was, REF as now), the role inspections and increased political interference by government. Most recently we can add TEF to that category. Further to this, Gammie (2006) argues that this 'increase in control' has resulted in a shift from organic to mechanistic structures in institutions, including a reduction in academic involvement in the decision making process.

Johnston (2017), in his research found that academics within post 1992 Universities had experienced significant growth in managerialism, while in pre1992 Universities managerialism had, had seemed to have less of an impact. The research concluded however, that academics' values and attitude were significantly influenced by their University. In particular this was evident within former Colleges of Higher Education where there was a particular historic connection to religion and education. Building on theory, if intrinsic

drivers within academics have been internalised through the ethos and values of the organisation, and thus, acceptance of the process, there is room for debating whether or not this has been constructed through managerialism or whether free will has held prominence.

Methodology

The research undertaken adopts a multiple case study design (Yin, 2014),. Traditionally research into higher education organisations, divides organisations into two categories (Bessant and Mavin, 2014), chartered (pre-1992) and statutory (post 1992), however this research divides them further by recategorising post 92 institutions into two, thus creating pre-1992, post 1992 ex-polytechnic and post-1992 ex College of Higher Education. The research adopts a combined ethnographic and constructivist approach, which is supported by Ridder et al (2014), who highlight that Case Study research is compatible with a range of different philosophical stances, while Thomas (2011 p68) suggests that “triangulation is almost an essential pre-requisite for using a case study approach”. This combined use of philosophies allows for effective triangulation and information gathering and reporting Radaelli et al (2014) argues for the use of Case Study research as it provides a useful demonstration of impact on business

The research will make use of the authors’ home institutions plus three others to provide balance to the study and make use of two institutions within each category. A combined purposive – convenience sampling method will be adopted (Avramenko, 2013) using a questionnaire, and will be distributed via email. Due to the differing sizes of the six institutions, it is intended to target a response rate of 20 questionnaire returns per institution. This would provide us with 120 respondents to the questionnaire.

Conclusion

Academics are just like any other functioning individual. They will have drivers which motivate and factors which demotivate. This research aims to identify the key drivers that make academics, academics. As such the research will be of interest to line managers and human resource departments and aid the ability of managers to get the best out of their staff and may lead to improvements in the psychological contract of staff.

Future Research and Developments

The current research is at the data collection stage and the intention is that initial findings will be available for discussion at the BAM 2017 Conference.

The research concentrates on academics' (within Business Schools) self-perception of what motivates them. Based on an earlier study it has been attempted to widen the net to identify and note if there is perhaps an organisational impact on the key drivers. Future developments will involve collecting qualitative data through interviews which would allow for a thorough investigation into people's meanings, and to broaden the scope to include a wider cross section of academics within the same institutions. As this research concentrates on UK institutions, there is also for the research to be widened to include institutions from outside the UK.

Regardless of the direction which future research takes it is intended that a multiple case study design (Yin, 2014) will be adopted, which will allow the findings to be both theoretically (Tsang, 2013) and analytically (Yin, 2014) generalisable.

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